

Exploring the ins and outs of "error" cents

By Roger Boye

Today's column begins with a question about error coins.

Q—Are 1983 "doubled die pennies" still popular with collectors? What should I look for when checking my change? Are there other doubled dies?

N. V., Rockford

A—The error cent retails for about \$175 if in choice uncirculated condition. You should examine the lettering on the "tails sides" of 1983 no-mint-mark cents for distinct doubling, which is most apparent in the "U" of "United" and the "O" of "One."

The 1955 Lincoln cent with doubling on the entire front side sells for as much as \$700 in choice uncirculated condition and the 1972 with front-side doubling goes for \$200. Coins with even the slightest wear bring lower prices.

Q—We've bought proof sets from the government in every

year since 1977. Is that a good way to make money?

Y. O., Chicago

A—No. The prices you paid ranged from \$9 for the 1977 set to \$11 for last year's version. At least seven of the sets have dropped in value on the retail market, while just two have shown significant price increases.

Uncle Sam's initial public offering usually satisfies collector demand for years to come. Prices decline because the supply of proof sets on the market outnumbers demand from new hobbyists.

You should order proof coins for their beauty and craftsmanship, not as a way to make a fast buck.

Q—I've got a \$1 bill that has a white streak within the front-side design. Apparently the paper fol-

ded during printing, leaving a blank slice that runs from top to bottom. How much is my dollar worth?

V. B., Chicago

A—A hobby catalogue suggests that your bill might retail for as much as \$15 if in crisp, uncirculated condition. The market value would depend in part on the length and location of the streak, called a "vertical fold."

Q—A friend gave me a 1976 silver Lincoln cent that is lighter in color than even the "steel cents" of World War II. Could it be rare?

D. F., Chicago

A—Most likely, someone plated the coin with a silver compound or treated it with a chemical to change the color. Either way, your cent would have no special value to a collector.